Palo Alto Unified School District

Parent Special Education Handbook

PUBLISHED BY

PALO ALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
The Office of Special Education –NW SELPA
25 Churchill Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94306

PAUSD Promise

Priority Areas

- **Serve and Celebrate Others –** *Fostering a culture of recognition and appreciation.*
- **Mental Health and Wellness –** *Expanding supports for students and staff, enhancing our community's well-being.*
- **Literacy –** *Leading California in reading growth for two consecutive years; a testament to our commitment to foundational skills.*
- **Equity and Excellence –** *Achieving significant strides in supporting previously underserved students, ensuring success for all.*
- **Innovation –** *Launching our new Middle College High School, embodying our commitment to cutting-edge educational practices.*

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Section A: Introduction

Special Education Mission Statement

The mission of the Office of Special Education is to provide programs and services that are designed to ensure that all students with special needs receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. The core function of this department is to support schools in providing high-quality education for students with special needs.

Special Education Services foster inclusive educational climates where individuality and diversity are respected, honored and celebrated. We strive to partner with our students and parents in designing the most exciting learning environments for the academic, social and emotional success of each student - where all teachers and staff design curriculum that is universally accessible for all students in alignment with our community's educational values and the District's Promise.

Vision And Goals For Special Education

PAUSD's vision for the special education program is that students with disabilities belong in the school community, receive individualized support to learn and progress, and prepare for meaningful participation in adult life.

Foundation: "Special Education students in PAUSD are first and foremost General Education students." PAUSD applies this principle by educating students alongside nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate, with services and placement determined by individual needs (Palo Alto Unified School District [PAUSD], n.d.-d).

The main goals reflected in PAUSD's materials are:

Goal	
Meaningful inclusion and belonging	Access to general education, grade-level learning, relationships with peers, and extracurricular opportunities.
Academic progress and equitable outcomes	Reduce achievement disparities associated with disability, strengthen access to instruction, and increase successful attainment of IEP goals.
Individualized instruction and services	Use IEP team decisions to provide the instruction, accommodations, related services, and settings each student needs to access and progress in the curriculum.

Independence and readiness for adult life	Develop self-determination, self-advocacy, employment skills, and readiness for college, further training, and independent living.
Authentic family partnership	Incorporate family perspectives into program review and recommendations through collaboration, listening, and advisory participation.
Accountability and continuous improvement	Use student data, program review, transparent recommendations, and reporting to improve the quality, equity, and inclusivity of services.
Legal compliance and protection of student rights	Ensure compliance with federal and California special education requirements, including a free appropriate public education (FAPE), timely assessments and IEP processes, implementation of required services and accommodations, meaningful parent participation, and protection of procedural rights.

Outcomes

- Increase the proportion of students with disabilities spending more than 80% of the instructional day in general education to at least 70%, from 68.5%.
- Increase the percentage of IEP goals successfully met by students in self-contained special education programs.
- Increase participation by students with disabilities in extracurricular and enrichment programs.
- Improve attendance, belonging, relationships, and academic outcomes across student groups, including students with disabilities.

These goals are drawn from PAUSD's Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging priorities, Programs & Services descriptions, and SEDAC responsibilities (PAUSD, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). PAUSD also publishes specific targets:

References:

Palo Alto Unified School District. (n.d.-a). *Equity, inclusion, and belonging*.

Palo Alto Unified School District. (n.d.-b). *Programs & services*.

Palo Alto Unified School District. (n.d.-c). *Special Education District Advisory Committee*.

Palo Alto Unified School District. (n.d.-d). *Special education process*.

Palo Alto Unified School District. (n.d.-e). *The Promise*.

Section B: Overview

A. Understanding Special Education Policies And Procedures

The Individuals with Disabilities Act, the Federal law governing special education, requires participating states to have policies and procedures to ensure that:
"A free appropriate public education is available to children with disabilities residing in the State between the ages of three (3) and twenty-two (22), inclusive, including children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school."

California law declares that:
"All individuals with disabilities with exceptional needs have a right to have – and participate in free appropriate public education and that special education instruction and services for these persons are necessary in order to ensure them of the right to appropriate educational opportunities to meet their unique needs."

Since it is the commitment and obligation of PAUSD and its staff to ensure that students with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE), the following questions and answers are designed to help the user understand FAPE and the overarching logic of special education policies and procedures.

Q: Who qualifies as a child with a disability for special education purposes?

A: There are three key criteria for determining if a child qualifies for special education:

1. The child must be identified as having a disability.
2. As a result of the disability, the child must require special education and related services to support their learning.
3. The child must be between the ages of three (3) and twenty-two (22).

If a child does not meet all of these criteria, they are not eligible for special education services.

Q: What are the eligibility categories for special education?

A: The following are the categories of disability:

- Autism
- Deaf/Blind
- Deafness
- Emotional Disability
- Established Medical Disability (Ages 3-4 only)
- Hearing Impairment
- Multiple Disabilities
- Intellectual Disability
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Specific Learning Disabilities
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment

Q: What is special education?

A: Special education is specially designed instruction, provided at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability. To be eligible for special education, a student must meet the criteria for one or more disability categories and, by reason of the disability, require special education and related services.

A student's unique educational needs are those needs resulting from the student's disability that require specially designed instruction. Specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the student's unique needs and to ensure access to the general education curriculum so that the student can meet the educational standards that apply to all students.

In California, Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI) is one way specially designed instruction may be provided based on the student's individual needs and IEP.

Q: What are related services?

A: Related services include transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education. To receive one or more related services a child must have a disability, need special education, and the related service must be determined to be necessary to benefit from special education. California law uses the term Designated Instructional Services (DIS) to mean Related Services. Related services include, but are not limited to:

- Audiology Services
- Counseling Services

- Speech and Language Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Transportation
- Assistive Technology
- Adaptive Physical Education (APE)
- Vision Services
- Orientation & Mobility

Q: Where may children with disabilities receive their special education and related services?

A: Federal and State law require that school districts ensure that a continuum of alternative placement is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities. The continuum, in descending order from the least to the most restrictive environment, includes instruction in:

- General Education Classes
- Special Education Classes
- Special Schools/Centers
- County Programs
- Nonpublic Schools
- Home
- Hospitals
- Residential Treatment Centers

Q: Is there a policy for determining the appropriate placement for the child?

A: Placement decisions are governed by the least restrictive environment (LRE) legal requirement. To the maximum degree appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are non-disabled and that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes even with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily." This means that decisions to place a child in a more restrictive environment should only be made after considering and determining that less restrictive environments with special education, related services and other supports cannot meet the student's needs. Students should not be placed in environments that are more restrictive than necessary to meet their educational needs. Placements for students with disabilities should be in the school they would attend if non-disabled or as close to their home as possible.

Q: How are all of the above decisions made?

A: The decisions are made by a team of people, including District personnel, the parents, the child, if appropriate, and others when appropriate who meet to develop a written individualized education program (IEP). The purpose of an IEP meeting is to bring together, in a collaborative and problem-solving manner, those persons with knowledge of and responsibility for the child's educational needs to determine what is appropriate to meet the student's needs.

Q: What happens if the IEP team cannot reach an agreement?

A: Every effort should be made to reach consensus, keeping the child's needs in mind. It is appropriate for the team to agree to implement those areas where there is consensus and/or to implement the IEP for an agreed upon period of time. Either the parent(s) or District staff may request that the matter be resolved through District informal dispute resolution, State mediation, or State due process hearing with option for mediation.

Q: What is a free appropriate public education (FAPE)?

A: FAPE means special education and related services that are provided in conformity with a child's IEP, are provided at public expense and under public supervision and direction, and meet the standards of the State. In simple terms, if a student is receiving what is specified in his/her IEP and the process from referral through development of the IEP was done in a manner consistent with policies and procedures, then the student is receiving FAPE. Ensuring that all PAUSD students with disabilities entitled to FAPE receive such services is our legal obligation and our professional responsibility.

Section C: The Special Education Process

Search And Serve (Child Find) Procedures

Under federal and state laws, schools have a legal obligation to identify, locate, and evaluate all children who may have disabilities and require special education services. This process is often referred to as "Search and Serve" or "Child Find."

Schools are responsible for ensuring that children from birth through age 21, including those in private schools, homeschooled, or highly mobile (such as migrant or homeless children), are identified if they may have disabilities. If a child is suspected of having a disability that affects their learning or development, the school must conduct assessments, with parental consent, to determine whether the child qualifies for special education services.

Parents, teachers, or other professionals can make referrals if they have concerns about a child's academic, social, or behavioral development. The goal of "Search and Serve" is to ensure that all children who need special education and related services receive them in a timely manner.

The special education process is designed to identify and support students with disabilities so they can succeed in school. Below is a simple overview of the key steps in this process:

1. **Referral for Assessment**

a. A child may be referred for special education assessment by a parent, teacher, or other professional if there are concerns about their learning, development, or behavior. This may start the evaluation process to see if the child has a disability that affects their education.

b. Once a written request for a special education assessment has been received, the administrator/designee has **15 days** to develop and provide the parents with a special education assessment plan. **Note***: A request for a special education assessment may be denied.*

i. The District has the right to refuse a request for a special education assessment if it does not believe that the student may have a disability requiring special education and related services. Administrator/designees should exercise this right only when there is documented evidence that the student is making educational progress or if the instructional difficulties are the results of factors other than a suspected disability. Parents have the right to a due process hearing to challenge the refusal. when the administrator/designee.

2. **Assessment**

a. With parental consent, the school conducts assessments in areas related to the suspected disability. These assessments are used to gather information about the child's strengths and areas of need.

3. **Eligibility Determination**

a. Once the assessments are completed, the IEP team (which includes parents) meets to review the results and determine if the child qualifies for special education services under one or more of the disability categories recognized by California Education Code. In order for a student to be eligible for special education the student must have a disability and a unique learning need that cannot be met through general education with appropriate accommodations and modifications, and must require special education services to meet his/her unique learning need as determined through assessment.

b. A student ceases to be eligible for special education if he/she no longer has a disability or has a unique need requiring special education. **Note:** *An assessment of the student must be conducted before the IEP team can make this determination.*

4. **Individualized Education Program (IEP) Development**

a. If the child is found eligible, the IEP team creates an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP outlines the child's educational goals, the services they will receive (such as specialized instruction, therapies, or accommodations), and how progress will be measured.

5. **IEP Implementation**

a. The services and supports listed in the IEP are put into action to help the child meet their educational goals. These services may be delivered in general education classrooms, special education settings, or a combination of both.

6. **Progress Monitoring and Annual Review**

a. The IEP team monitors the child's progress throughout the year. The IEP is reviewed annually, but parents or school staff can request a meeting at any time to discuss changes or updates to the plan.

7. **Reevaluation**

a. Every three years, the child must be reassessed to determine if they still qualify for special education services and if their needs have changed.

The goal of the special education process is to provide the right support so that every child can succeed in school. Throughout the process, parents are key partners in decision-making, working with the school team to ensure the best outcomes for their child.

IDENTIFYING AND SERVING STUDENTS ENROLLING IN THE SCHOOL

All school districts are responsible for having procedures in place to identify and promptly serve students, who require or may need special services, when they enroll in the school district. The mechanism for implementing the procedures in the District's *Student Enrollment Form* must be completed by parents at the time they are enrolling their child. The following questions are asked:

1. Does your student have a current IEP?
2. Does your student have a current Section 504 Plan?

If all questions are answered NO, further follow-up is not required.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meeting

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document that is the District's offer of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and is developed and agreed to by a team. The IEP will document: **(See appendix for federal regulation 34 C.F.R. 300.320 (LRE))**

- Whether the student is eligible for special education and related services.
- The student's present levels of educational performance and educational needs.
- The goals and objectives the student is to achieve.
- The special education, related services, accommodations, and modifications the student needs and will receive.
- The appropriate placement for the student.

- How the student's progress will be assessed and reported.
- Other factors as identified in the federal regulation 34 C.F.R. 300.320 (LRE).

IEP's that meet legal requirements and address student needs are the cornerstone of an effective special education program.

WHEN MUST AN IEP MEETING BE HELD

An IEP Team must meet whenever any of the following occurs:

- A student has been assessed pursuant to an assessment plan. This includes initial assessments, triennial assessments, or other assessments.
- At least annually, to review the student's progress and eligibility and make necessary revisions.
- A student demonstrates a lack of anticipated progress.
- The parent or District staff member requests a meeting to review the IEP.
- There is a proposal to change the student's eligibility, services, or placement. **Note:** *If there is a belief that the IEP team will consider exiting the student from special education services because the student no longer has a disability or requires special education service, an assessment of the student is required.*
- The student reaches five (10) cumulative days of suspension (a manifestation determination).
- When a student with an IEP transfers into the PAUSD from another school district by the 30th day.

MEMBERS OF THE IEP TEAM

The following persons are required at all IEP team meetings:

1. One or both parents/guardians of the student.
2. An administrator or administrative designee.
3. At least one special education teacher of the student. **Note:** *This may be the speech-language pathologist if this is the only special education service the student is or may be receiving.*
4. At least one general education teacher of the student.
5. A person knowledgeable about the assessment procedures used to assess the student, familiar with the results of the assessment and qualified to interpret the instructional implications of the results, if the results are significant to the matters being considered at the IEP meeting.

Note: *The student must be invited if a transition plan is being developed or reviewed at an IEP meeting.* At the discretion of the parent and/or the District, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise concerning the student, including related services personnel, as appropriate.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document that is the District's offer of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and is developed and agreed to by a team. The IEP will document: **(See appendix for federal regulation 34 C.F.R. 300.320 (LRE))**

- Whether the student is eligible for special education and related services.
- The student's present levels of educational performance and educational needs.
- The goals and objectives the student is to achieve.
- The special education, related services, accommodations, and modifications the student needs and will receive.
- The appropriate placement for the student.
- How the student's progress will be assessed and reported.
- Other factors as identified in the federal regulation 34 C.F.R. 300.320 (LRE).

The IEP is:

- An agreement that the student will receive what is specified in the IEP.
- A communication vehicle enabling parents, professionals and, as appropriate, the student as equal participants to make joint informed decisions.
- A compliance tool enabling school districts and State and Federal agencies to determine whether a student is receiving a free appropriate public education by assessing whether the IEP meets legal requirements and whether the student is receiving what is documented on the IEP.
- A student-centered management tool used to ensure that a student is provided with needed special education and related services.
- A commitment of resources necessary to enable the student to receive needed special education and related services.

The IEP is not:

- A guarantee that a student will achieve the goals and objectives set forth in their IEP.
- A vehicle for specifying the methodologies teachers and other professionals will use with the student.

Placement In The Least Restrictive Environment

The concept of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) means that, to the greatest extent appropriate, students with disabilities should be educated alongside their peers without disabilities. Schools must first consider placement in general education classrooms with the use of supports and services before exploring more specialized settings. The goal is to provide students with the support they need to succeed while still being part of the general school community.

If a student's needs cannot be met solely in a general education classroom, schools offer a continuum of placements to ensure that every child's unique needs are addressed. Each student's placement is based on their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and is reviewed regularly by the IEP team, including parents, to ensure that the placement remains appropriate as the student progresses.

Section D: Special Education Services And Supports

Accommodations And Modifications

In an Individualized Education Program (IEP), accommodations and modifications are tools used to support students with disabilities in accessing the general education curriculum. Although both are designed to help students succeed, they serve different purposes. Understanding the distinction between the two is important for ensuring that your child receives the right kind of support.

Accommodations: Accommodations are changes to how a student learns or demonstrates their knowledge, without altering the curriculum or academic expectations. Accommodations allow students to access the same material as their peers and demonstrate their understanding in a way that works best for them. Accommodations are intended to level the playing field.

Examples of Accommodations:

- Extended time on tests or assignments.
- Preferential seating in the classroom.
- Use of assistive technology (e.g., speech-to-text software).
- Additional breaks or a quiet space for completing tasks.
- Providing materials in larger print or with visual aids.

Accommodations ensure that the student can participate in the general education curriculum, but the academic content and expectations remain the same as for their peers.

Modifications: Modifications, on the other hand, involve changes to what a student is expected to learn. When modifications are used, the content, curriculum, or academic expectations are adjusted to better align with the student's abilities. Modifications are more significant changes and may reduce the complexity or scope of the learning material.

Examples of Modifications:

- Altering the content or grading scale (e.g., focusing on basic concepts rather than grade-level standards).
- Providing alternative assessments or projects instead of traditional tests.

Modifications are used when a student's disability prevents them from mastering the same content as their peers, even with accommodations. They help students access the curriculum at a level appropriate to their needs.

Key Differences:

- Accommodations adjust *how* the student learns the material or demonstrates their knowledge, without changing the academic expectations.
- Modifications adjust *what* the student is learning by changing the content or expectations to match the student's abilities.

Both accommodations and modifications are carefully considered by the IEP team to ensure that your child can succeed in school while receiving the right level of support tailored to their individual needs.

Related And Supplementary Services

The IEP will outline services that a student will need to reasonably achieve the goals and objectives that were developed in the IEP. In order for an IEP team to recommend a special education or related service, the goals and objectives agreed to must justify the need for the service and provide the direction necessary to guide the providers' work with the student. In addition, for a student to receive a related service, an assessment, conducted by a qualified assessor, must have indicated the student's need for the service and that the service can not be provided by a general or special educator.

Possible services provided through an IEP, based on individual student need, include:

Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI): Targeted instruction designed to address a student's individual learning needs. This can be provided in general education classrooms, resource rooms, or special day classes.

Speech and Language Therapy: Services to support communication skills, including articulation, language development, social communication, and speech fluency. Provided by a licensed speech-language pathologist.

Occupational Therapy (OT): Support to improve fine motor skills, sensory processing, and daily living skills that affect a student's ability to function in the school environment. Provided by a licensed occupational therapist.

Physical Therapy (PT): Services focused on improving a student's gross motor skills, mobility, and physical access to the school environment. Provided by a licensed physical therapist.

Behavioral Support Services: Interventions and strategies to help manage challenging behaviors, including the development of a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). Services may include counseling, behavior consultation, or support from behavior specialists.

Counseling and Guidance: Individual or group counseling to support emotional, social, or mental health needs that impact learning. May include social skills training or emotional regulation strategies.

Assistive Technology (AT) Services: The assessment and provision of devices or technology that support a student's learning, communication, or access to the curriculum (e.g., speech-generating devices, modified keyboards, software).

Adapted Physical Education (APE): Specialized physical education program designed to meet the unique motor and physical fitness needs of students with disabilities, focusing on modified activities.

Extended School Year (ESY): Additional instructional time during summer break for students who are at risk of significant regression in their skills without continued services.

Transportation: Services provided to ensure a student can safely and consistently travel to and from school, including specialized transportation for students with mobility challenges or significant behavioral needs.

Vision Services: Support for students with visual impairments, including instruction in Braille, orientation and mobility training, and specialized equipment for accessing the curriculum.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHH): Support for students with hearing impairments, including the use of hearing aids, sign language interpreters, or FM systems, as well as specialized instruction in communication skills.

Health and Nursing Services: Medical support for students with health needs that affect their school day, including medication management, feeding assistance, or emergency care for conditions like epilepsy or diabetes.

Psychological Services: Assessment and support from school psychologists, including evaluations for eligibility, development of social-emotional goals, and counseling for emotional or behavioral needs.

Parent Counseling and Training: Services designed to help parents understand their child's needs and provide strategies for supporting their education and behavior at home.

These services are tailored to meet the specific needs of each student and are outlined in their IEP based on assessments and team decisions. The goal is to ensure that students receive the appropriate support to succeed in school.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

The BIP is based on a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) designed to support students whose serious behaviors interfere with his/her learning or the learning of others; interfere with the implementation of IEP goals and objectives; are self-injurious, assault, or cause serious property damage; are severe, pervasive, and maladaptive; and require frequent and systematic behavioral interventions. The purpose of the BIP is to enable the student to achieve a better quality of life through improved self-determination and self-control. It is also to be used to guide the on-going professional development for new team members who join the student's collaborative team.

Transition Planning

The **Individual Transition Plan (ITP)** is a crucial part of the IEP process for students with disabilities, designed to help them successfully transition from school to adult life. Starting at

age 16 (or younger if appropriate), the ITP outlines the steps, goals, and services needed to prepare the student for life after high school, including further education, employment, and independent living.

What Does the ITP Include?

The ITP is student-centered and focuses on the student's strengths, preferences, and interests. It covers key areas of adult life, including:

- **Education and Training:** Supports the student in continuing education, whether in a vocational program, college, or other educational settings.
- **Employment:** Helps the student develop skills and explore options for entering the workforce, including job training, internships, and career counseling.
- **Independent Living Skills:** For students who may need it, the ITP can also include services that help them learn essential life skills such as managing finances, navigating public transportation, and living independently.

The Transition Process

1. **Assessment:** The transition planning process begins with an age-appropriate transition assessment to identify the student's strengths, interests, and areas where support is needed for post-secondary success.
2. **Goal Setting:** Based on the assessment, the IEP team (including the student and parents) will develop measurable, realistic transition goals. These goals will guide the services and supports needed to help the student reach their post-secondary objectives.
3. **Services and Supports:** The ITP outlines the specific services and supports the student will receive, such as job coaching, college preparation, or independent living skills training. The plan may also involve community agencies, vocational programs, and other resources to help the student achieve their goals.
4. **Student Involvement:** The student plays an important role in developing the ITP. They are encouraged to participate in IEP meetings, voice their interests, and set their own goals for the future.

Why Is the ITP Important?

The ITP is essential for preparing students for life after high school, ensuring they have the skills and support needed to succeed in whatever path they choose. It creates a clear roadmap for the transition from school to adulthood, whether that includes higher education, employment, or independent living. Parents are key partners in this process, working with the school and the student to ensure that the transition plan is comprehensive and tailored to their child's individual needs and aspirations. Through the ITP, the IEP team helps students take the steps necessary to achieve their post-high school goals and ensures a smooth transition into adult life.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Under federal and state law, every child with a disability is entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). FAPE ensures that students with disabilities receive the educational services and supports they need at no cost to families, so they can make progress in school and prepare for future opportunities, such as further education, employment, and independent living.

In California, FAPE means that students are provided with an education that:

- Is individualized to meet their unique needs through the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Includes access to the general education curriculum, as well as specialized instruction and related services tailored to their abilities and needs.
- Is delivered in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), meaning that students are educated with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate.
- Provides the opportunity for students to achieve meaningful educational progress, as determined by the goals set in their IEP.

The IEP team, including parents, teachers, and specialists, works together to ensure that each student receives the appropriate services and supports needed to access and benefit from their education, in compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and California Education Code.

Section E: Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

PAUSD is committed to meeting the educational needs of every student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and fostering positive, collaborative relationships with families. We recognize that disagreements or concerns may arise regarding a student's special education program or services. When this occurs, we encourage families and school staff to work together to address concerns early, maintain open communication, and identify solutions that support the student's educational needs.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) can begin at the school site. Families are encouraged to first share their concerns with their child's case manager, service provider, or school site administrator. Many concerns can be addressed through direct communication, collaborative problem-solving meetings, or reconvening the IEP team to review the student's needs, discuss differing perspectives, and explore possible solutions. Site administrators and District special education staff can assist in facilitating these conversations when additional support is needed.

When concerns remain unresolved, or when families and staff would benefit from additional assistance, PAUSD and families may access ADR resources through the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA). ADR provides opportunities to address disagreements in a collaborative, less formal setting, with the goal of reaching mutually agreeable solutions while maintaining positive working relationships.

Families and school districts have access to the following options:

1. School Site Collaborative Problem-Solving

The first step in addressing many special education concerns is communication and collaboration at the school site. Parents/guardians may contact their child's case manager, service provider, or site administrator to discuss questions or concerns related to IEP implementation, services, supports, or educational programming.

Depending on the nature of the concern, the school team may:

- Arrange a meeting with relevant staff and the family to better understand the concern.
- Review the student's IEP, progress, services, and current supports.
- Identify possible solutions and agree upon follow-up actions.
- Reconvene the IEP team when decisions regarding the student's IEP need to be considered.
- Request assistance from District special education staff or the SELPA when additional support would be beneficial.

The goal is to address concerns as early as possible through respectful communication, shared understanding, and collaborative problem-solving.

2. SELPA Telephone Intermediary (Help Line)

The ADR Help Line serves as a resource for parents of students with disabilities and IEP team members. It provides information and clarification regarding special education processes, Procedural Safeguards, and available options for addressing concerns and resolving disagreements.

The Help Line may also connect families with appropriate agencies for additional support and resources and provide guidance regarding formal complaint processes when necessary.

3. SELPA Case Management Support

SELPA case management support is available to assist families and school districts in resolving disagreements through collaborative problem-solving meetings. These meetings may include parents, special education and general education staff, administrators, and other IEP team members. The goal is to foster open communication, clarify concerns, explore possible solutions, and work toward mutually agreeable resolutions in a supportive and constructive environment.

4. Facilitated IEP Meetings

A Facilitated IEP meeting involves a neutral facilitator who helps guide discussions during an IEP meeting. The facilitator supports effective communication, ensures that participants have

opportunities to share their perspectives, and helps the team remain focused on the student's educational needs.

Facilitated IEP meetings can be particularly helpful when there are differing perspectives, complex concerns, or challenges reaching agreement. This process encourages collaboration and supports productive, student-centered discussions.

5. Mediation Only (State-Level Voluntary Dispute Resolution)

Mediation Only is a voluntary, confidential dispute resolution process offered through the California Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH).

A neutral mediator, who is not associated with either the District or the family, facilitates discussions between the parties. The mediator helps participants communicate openly, identify areas of agreement, and work toward a mutually acceptable resolution.

The mediator does not make decisions or take sides. Mediation provides a less adversarial option for resolving disagreements while allowing families and school districts to maintain control over the outcome.

6. Formal Due Process (Office of Administrative Hearings – OAH)

Parents/guardians and school districts have the right to request a Due Process Hearing through OAH to resolve certain disputes involving special education identification, evaluation, placement, or the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

This formal legal process involves presenting evidence and arguments before an administrative law judge, who issues a legally binding decision, subject to applicable appeal rights.

7. Filing a Complaint with the California Department of Education (CDE)

Families may also file a State Complaint with the California Department of Education (CDE) if they believe the District has violated federal or state special education requirements.

The CDE reviews and investigates complaints within its jurisdiction and issues findings and, when appropriate, corrective actions.

How to Get Started

We encourage families to begin by communicating with their child's school team. Many concerns can be resolved through early conversations, collaborative meetings, and ongoing communication. Families may also contact the PAUSD Special Education Department for assistance or request support through the SELPA.

For more information or to request ADR assistance, please contact the PAUSD Special Education Department or complete the SELPA ADR Services Referral Form.

Important: While collaborative resolution is encouraged, families are not required to exhaust school-site or informal ADR options before exercising their procedural safeguards, including requesting mediation or due process or filing a state complaint, as applicable. These rights remain available regardless of participation in local problem-solving efforts.

Section F: Acronyms

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

APE: Adapted Physical Education

AP: Assessment Plan

ASL: American Sign Language

AT: Assistive Technology

AUT: Autism

BIP: Behavior Intervention Plan

CAA: California Alternate Assessment

CBI: Community Based Instruction

CEC: California Education Code

CCR: California Code of Regulations

CCR: Coordinated Compliance Review

CDE: California Department of Education

CFR: Code of Federal Regulations

CP: Cerebral Palsy

CUM: Cumulative File

PAUSD: Palo Alto Unified School District

DD: Developmental Disability

DHH: Deaf and/or Hard of Hearing

ED: Emotional Disability

ELD: English Language Development

ELL: English Language Learner

ESY: Extended School Year

FBA: Functional Behavior Assessment

FERPA: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

FAPE: Free Appropriate Public Education

504: Section of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

IAES: Interim Alternative Educational Setting

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEE: Independent Educational evaluation

IEP: Individual Education Program

IHE: Institution of Higher Education

ITP: Individual Transition Plan

LEA: Local Education Agency

LRE: Least Restrictive Environment

LEP: Limited English Proficient

Medi-Cal: California's Medicaid Program

MOU: Memorandum of Understanding

ID: Intellectual Disability

NPA: Nonpublic Agency

NPS: Nonpublic School

OCR: Office of Civil Rights

OHI: Other Health Impaired

OI: Orthopedic Impairment

OT: Occupational Therapy

OSEP: Office of Special Education Programs

PE: Physical Education

PT: Physical Therapy

RFEP: Redesignated Fluent English Proficient

SARB: School Attendance and Review Board

SEA: State Education Agency

SELPA: Special Education Local Plan Area

SECEO: Special Education Certificated Employment Office

SLD: Specific Learning Disability

SLP: Speech Language Pathologist

SST: Student Study Team

TBI: Traumatic Brain Injury

USC: United States Code

VI: Visually impaired.